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ABSTRACT

In order to study the relationship between self-esteem and communication anxiety, 1202 college students in a basic communication course completed scales developed to measure the two variables. To make sure that the variables were independent and that one was not a subset of the other, a factor analysis of all the items in each scale was performed. This analysis indicated that self-esteem and communication anxiety are conceptually distinct. Further analysis devised to describe relationships between sets of variables indicated that the combination of the two scales produced complex interactions. It was concluded that, while the inverse relation between self-esteem and communication anxiety occurred in a majority of the cases studied, a substantial number of persons in the study did not fit such a pattern and the relationship of self-esteem and communication anxiety is much more subtle and more complex than previously supposed. Tables of the factor analyses performed illustrate the text. (RL)

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The Inter-relationship Between Self-Esteem and Communication Anxiety

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The relationship between communication anxiety and self-esteem has been commented on frequently in the literature of speech communication. Generally, the nature of this relationship has been assumed to be linear and negative. That is, if a person has a positive self-image, presumably they should have little communication anxiety; if a person has a poor self-image, they should have a high level of communication anxiety. This assumed relationship is illustrated in such statements as "stage fright may also be an expression of chronic personality insecurity" (Jeffery & Peterson, 1975, p. 62) or "a feeling of unworthiness about being a speaker is another primary symptom of speech tension" (Makay, 1977, p. 24). Other writers have phrased the idea in slightly different words--stage fright "may be the result of an under-evaluation of one's abilities . . ." (Kruger, 1970, p. 373)--but the implications are the same.

Still another way of looking at self-esteem and communication anxiety is to presume that low self-esteem directly affects the speaker's behavior and that the audience reacts to that behavior. For example, low self-esteem might cause the speaker to be disorganized and it is the disorganization to which the listeners react. As suggested by some writers (Bormann & Bormann, 1977, p. 139), "an audience is quick to pick up cues about the way a speaker feels about himself" or "one's estimate of himself directly affects the way he communicates with others" (Abernathy, 1976, p. 17).

The orientation from which all of the above writers appear to be operating is illustrated in Figure 1. Interestingly, this orientation seems to be the outgrowth of pure theory with virtually no research.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Further, the logical combinations are not complete within the existing framework. That is, can there be an individual who has low self-esteem and little or no communication anxiety (cell a)? Or, can there be an individual who has high self-esteem and high communication anxiety (cell d)? These two types of persons have never been considered. To take the extreme view, the present theory might argue that these two types of persons are highly unlikely to exist.

The purpose, then of the present investigation is to explore the inter-relationships between self-esteem and communication anxiety.

Method

Two independent measures were chosen.[1] Each measure was selected to meet standards of applicability to the test population and possessing a known dimensionality. Both the McCroskey scale of communication anxiety (1970) and the Rosenburg scale of self-esteem (1965) were developed for young adult populations. Further, both communication anxiety (McCroskey, 1970) and self-esteem (Hensley & Roberts, 1976; Hensley, in press) appear to be unidimensional.

Both self-esteem and communication anxiety were measured in a larger survey of communication behaviors among college students. The sampling took place over two semesters in a basic communication course. Students in the course (N = 1202) completed the scales as a part of their normal classroom activities.

Results and Discussion

The first concern was to test the relationship suggested in Figure 1. Both self-esteem and communication anxiety were dichotomized at the mean to obtain high and low groups. A simple cross sort yielded the results shown in Table 1. Clearly, the majority of cases (62.6%) do fall along the diagonal predicted in Figure 1. However, a substantial number of persons (37.4%) do not fit the hypothesized pattern.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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All four types of individuals do exist.

Next, an investigation of the structure of the two concepts was undertaken. Was it possible, for example, that communication anxiety was a subset of self-esteem? Or perhaps the reverse? A factor analysis of all 30 variables--the 20 items of communication anxiety and the 10 of self-esteem--was performed.

An orthogonal solution was obtained using an eigenvalue cutoff of 1.00, varimax rotation, and multiple R^2 for diagonal replacement. However, an orthogonal solution forces the emergent factors into an independent pattern whether they really fit that pattern or not. An oblique factor solution, allowing intercorrelation among factors, will replicate the orthogonal solution if the factors are truly independent. Therefore, as a cross check, an oblique analysis was performed. The orthogonal and the oblique solutions are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

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They are virtually identical. The orthogonal solution is appropriate. Both solutions yield two distinct factors: communication anxiety and self-esteem. Hence, self-esteem and communication anxiety appear to be conceptually distinct.

These data might lead one to believe that there was little or no correlation between self-esteem and communication anxiety. Such is not the case. A correlation between the two shows them to be linearly related at -.396, although the explained variance is not particularly high (16%).

We are now faced with two conceptually independent measures--self-esteem and communication anxiety; however, we still do not know the precise relationship between the two. Fortunately, canonical correlational analysis is designed for this precise problem i.e. describing the relationships among two sets of variables. The analysis is presented in Table 4.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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It would be a gross understatement to say that the pattern shown here is unclear. Mathematically, the first canonical explains all the variance it can; then there is an attempt to explain the remaining variance with the second canonical, then the third and so forth. This process continues in a fashion similar to multiple regression. It is important to note that each canonical

is explaining variance which is non-redundant. By this logic a scale item should load, in the factor analytic sense, or only one of the canonical variates. This does not happen. It is also clear that the analysis is not reproducing the two scales of communication anxiety and self-esteem. The only thing which is obvious is that the combination of the two scales produces complex interactions. Beyond that, it is only clear that our hope for a simple explanation (Figure 1) of how self-esteem and communication anxiety relate is not in the cards.

Conclusions

In order to end on a positive note, there are a few things revealed by the study. Among them are:

1. The inverse formulation between self-esteem and communication anxiety advanced by writers of speech communication textbooks is, in general, accurate.
2. However, there is a sizable percentage of persons, about two in five, who do not fit the formulation.
3. Self-esteem and communication anxiety are conceptually distinct from one another.
4. Finally, the more subtle inter-relationships between self-esteem and communication anxiety are apparently more complex than we had heretofore supposed.

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Footnotes

[1]It should be emphasized that these measures were not randomly selected from a pool of all possible scales. Rather, the measures were chosen from the experience and interests of the writer. Thus, in the most narrow interpretation, the study is more illustrative than definitive.

Table 1

Relationship Between Self-Esteem

and

Communication Anxiety

Self-Esteem	Communication Anxiety: Low	Communication Anxiety: High	
Low	220 18.3%	410 34.1%	630
High	343 28.5%	229 19.1%	572
	563	639	1202

Table 2

Orthogonal Factor Analysis of

Self-Esteem and Communication Anxiety

Communication Anxiety[a]	Factor I	Factor II
1	.47	-.25
2	-.70	.06
3	-.58	.20
4	-.47	.11
5	.48	-.21
6	.56	-.25
7	.71	-.10
8	.64	-.14
9	.72	-.12
10	-.50	.12
11	.69	-.20
12	.71	-.17
13	-.51	.12
14	.39	-.30
15	.36	-.21
16	-.64	.20
17	.52	-.18
18	-.65	.08
19	-.69	.01
20	-.78	.04
Self Esteem[b]		
1	.13	-.60
2	-.21	.72
3	.15	-.67
4	.17	-.60
5	.13	-.54
6	-.15	.66
7	-.11	.67
8	.12	-.61
9	-.08	.60
10	-.11	.55

Note: [a]Items presented in the same order as in McCroskey (1970)

[b]Items were presented in the same order as in Hensley and Roberts (1976)

Table 3

Oblique Factor Analysis of

Self-Esteem and Communication Anxiety

Communication Anxiety[a]	Factor I	Factor II
1	.45	-.15
2	-.74	-.10
3	-.58	.07
4	-.48	.00
5	.47	-.11
6	.54	-.13
7	.74	.07
8	.65	.01
9	.75	.04
10	-.52	.00
11	.70	-.04
12	.72	-.01
13	-.53	.00
14	.35	-.23
15	.34	-.14
16	-.65	.06
17	.51	-.07
18	-.68	-.07
19	-.74	-.16
20	-.83	-.15
Self Esteem[b]		
1	.01	-.61
2	-.07	.72
3	.02	-.68
4	.05	-.60
5	.02	-.55
6	-.01	.67
7	.03	.69
8	-.01	-.62
9	.05	.62
10	.01	.57

Note: [a]Items were presented in the same order as in McCroskey (1970)

[b]Items were presented in the same order as in Hensley and Roberts (1976)

Table 4

Canonical Variates for Self-Esteem

and Communication Anxiety

(only those coefficients $\geq .30$ are shown)

	I	II	III	IV
Communication Anxiety				
1				
2				-.77
3				
4				-.41
5		-.30		
6		.40		-.30
7				
8		-.32		.42
9		-.41	.38	
10				
11				-.50
12				
13		-.44		
14	-.44	-.45		
15			.56	
16		-.38		
17			-.34	.37
18			.51	.72
19				
20			.31	
Self Esteem				
1		-.59		-.83
2	.33	-.74		-.36
3			.36	
4	-.33	-.54		.34
5			-.58	.61
6			-.41	
7		-.44	.47	.47
8		-.32	.64	
9				
10				.61
R_c	.49	.31	.27	.20
Eigenvalue	.24	.10	.07	.04

Figure 1

Presumed Relationship Between

Self-Esteem and Communication Anxiety